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## Instructional Communication in Nigeria Secondary Schools: A Curriculum Hangover?

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### **Abstract:**

*This paper presented an analysis of Nigeria secondary school teachers' instructional behaviour on the backdrop of the importance of secondary school education as a pivot for national development. The paper argued that secondary school teachers are not communicating well and blamed their inability to do so on curriculum deficiency based on the analysis of the course content they are exposed at during teacher training programmes both at intermediate and degree levels. The paper advised on broaden the contents of instructional communication of teacher education programmes by including verbal and non-verbal communication skills and also called for a collaborative effort between teacher education institutions, professional associations and teacher employers to deliver such content*

**Keywords:** Curriculum, instructional communication, secondary school, teachers

### **1. Introduction**

Secondary education in Nigeria is very pivotal to educational development of any child albeit national development if we take into consideration the fact that performance at secondary education level determines the progression of a child in his/her educational pursuit. Therefore, what the teacher does at this level will leave an indelible impression on the academic life of the child. For a teacher to leave positive everlasting impression on a child educational development he/she has to convey accurately and diligently the subject matter of education at secondary level. The instructional communication options a teacher decides to select in delivering his/her lessons does not only ensure smooth learning, it also impact on the interest the learner has for learning. Therefore, teacher's lapse in this singular area could put teaching and learning at secondary school, and any level for that matter, to jeopardy.

Secondary school education is pivotal to our national development. This is because students are introduced to various subject areas and concepts that will be harnessed for further expansion at high education. The secondary education curriculum in Nigeria is heavily loaded. Students are expected to learn so many subjects within the six years they will spend at this level of education. This is cumbersome in itself without adding the factor of poor lesson delivery by teachers orchestrated by poor communication. Effective communication in our classrooms is a must for it serves as catalysts for creating an interactive, student-centred learning situation where students become actively involved in constructing and using knowledge which can bring out the creativity and ingenuity that they are endowed with. Collective harvest of these natural endowments of citizens of a nation is what facilitates national development. The questions this paper sets out to address are: what is the instructional communication situation in Nigeria secondary schools? What is responsible for the instructional situation in our secondary school? How do we improve instructional communication in our secondary school? Answers to these questions will help to set trajectory that will improve teaching and learning at this level of education to promote sustainable development.

### **2. Instructional Communication in Secondary Schools**

The process of teaching and learning is about communication. Teacher has to code appropriately and transmit accurately for knowledge to be assimilated. The students on the other hand, have to indicate by a way of communication their assimilation of the knowledge passed in the classroom as well as indicate where they need further explanation. Therefore, in the simplest term, instructional communication can be explained as exchange of information in a learning environment. Consequently, if there is a breakdown in communication in the classroom, teaching and learning cannot take place.

Available pieces of literature have indicated that most Nigerian teachers have communication deficiency. For example, Nwogu cited in Iyamu & Iseguan(2009) observes that one of the major obstacles to effective teaching in Nigerian

schools is the inability of teachers to communicate effectively. This probably informed their research on the communication proficiency of Social Studies teachers in selected secondary schools in South Central Nigeria. The result of Iyamu & Iseguan research showed that a trifle of 6% to 14% of their Social Studies teachers investigated was good in communication.

Preliminary information from an ongoing research on communication profile of Sokoto State secondary school teachers which this writer is engaged in has shown that there are issues about teacher's instructional communication behaviour. For example, many of the subjects were found to have violated communication ethics of respect. Respectful communication in the classroom presupposes that teachers and students exhibit decorum in the tone they use, tactful in navigating nutty issues, choose words that are appropriate to learning situation and above all use non-inflammatory language. A situation where teachers demonstrate impatience with students' questions, use violent language and sometime result to using cane to shut students up shows disrespect in information exchange. The consequent of this behaviour is the chorus 'yes uncle' or 'yes aunty' that greets the teacher's probing question 'Do you understand?'

The above situation probably arises as a result of instructional communication pattern the teachers have adopted. Majority of the teachers adopted what James, Kristin and Virgillia (2004) refer to as rhetorical approach to instructional communication. This model assumes that in instruction, teachers are the primary source of information and are responsible for creating it in a way that will stimulate teacher-selected meanings in students' minds. In this model, students are mere recipients of information and their contributions do not count much. Thus, one finds that the teacher's 'mono-droning' voice rings throughout a class session with intermittent interjection of 'yes uncle' or 'yes aunty' by the students. There is a problem here. Literature has shown that explanations, the main method adopted by many of Nigeria secondary teachers, may not be as effective as one may want. For instance, Berthold & Renkl (2010) reported that empirical studies show that explanations have little positive effects on learning outcomes and attributed the ineffectiveness partly to problems on the ability of the teachers in adapting the messages to the knowledge and needs of the learners.

One other area in which teachers of secondary schools in Nigeria are found wanting is the level of preparation to accommodate exigencies of communication in the classroom. Many of the teachers appeared unprepared for their lessons thus lack substance in their presentation. Because they are ill prepared, they cannot cope with communication exigencies in the class. For effective communication to take place, teachers should prepare to use different techniques in communication. Lessons that involve multimodal presentations have been found to be more beneficiary to learners than teacher's monotone presentation. There are several instructional materials that could assist a teacher to make his/her point effectively as well as varying the mode of presentation but one hardly sees them in most of Nigeria classrooms.

For example, instructional materials that appeal to both eyes and ears aid verbal communication and learning significantly. In support of this, a study conducted by Choi and Johnson reported in Choi & Yang (2011) compared the effectiveness of video and text as media to present a problem in problem-based instruction at the college level. The result indicated that the problem-based video instruction (PBVI) group outperformed the problem-based text instruction (PBTI) group on the comprehension test. Similarly, a study conducted by Ibrahim (2014) on effectiveness of video presentation mode on the use of some grammatical structures among senior secondary students in Sokoto State, Nigeria showed similar results of students that went through video instruction learnt and use adjectival, adverbial and noun phrases in the right context better than those who received verbal explanation only. The question to ask is why are teachers of secondary schools not making use of the right instructional communication options in their lesson delivery? This question is addressed in the next segment.

### **3. Instructional Communication and Curriculum Hangover**

This segment sets out to explore the possible causes of secondary school teachers' deficiency in instructional communication. There is a need to ask if teacher education programmes adequately prepared secondary school teachers in act of communication. If they have not, secondary school teachers cannot entirely be blamed for their inability to communicate effectively in the class. In addressing the first question, Nwogu cited in Iyamu & Iseguan (2009) blames the curriculum. According to him, the linguistic weakness of most Nigerian teachers is attributable to poor foundations, poor training and influence of local dialects. This statement sent the current writer looking at the curricula of Teacher Education that produce teachers for secondary schools. The minimum qualification required to teach at Junior Secondary School in Nigeria is Nigerian Certificate in Education (NCE) while a teacher teaching at Senior Secondary Education level is expected to possess a degree with education background. Therefore, the curricular of these two levels of teacher education were examined for provision of instructional communication.

The curriculum for Nigeria Certificate in Education is provided by the regulating body National Commission for Colleges of Education in form of Minimum Bench Mark issued to all colleges of education in the country. It is on the basis of this document that accreditation of programmes in colleges of education is carried out at regular interval to ensure compliance to quality of teacher education. The curriculum of university education on the other hand is provided by National University Commission for the same purpose of ensuring quality assurance in university education. These two documents were examined to ascertain the provision they make for instructional communication development in their products. For NCE programme, the Minimum Standards document for Adult Non-Formal and Special Education (2012 Edition) was examined. As for the degree programme, National Universities Commission Benchmark for Minimum Academic Standards for undergraduate programmes in Nigerian universities (2007) was analysed.

Table 1 contains the course structure of NCE in Adult Education and Non-formal Education. The Table shows that the number of units to be earned from subject area is 81, Education courses account for 27 units while GSE courses account for 18 units. Out of all the courses an NCE student offering this programme earns, 21 units are considered by this presentation to be related to Instructional Communication. In percentage terms, out of 126 units to be offered in the programme, 21 representing 26.46% is adjudged to be Instructional Communication related. Table 2 captured the courses in question for further consideration.

Semester	Units of Subject Area	Unit of Education	Unit of GSE	Units Related to Instructional Communication
Year 1 Semester 1	18	4	3	7
Year 1 Semester 2	13	10	4	3
Year 2 Semester 1	18	4	3	7
Year 2 Semester 2	18	4	4	3
Year 3 Semester 1	Teaching Practice			
Year 3 Semester 2	14	5	4	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>21</b>

Table 1: Breakdown of NCE Programme Course on Adult and Non-Formal Education

The thirteen courses considered to be related to our discussion are in three categories. The first category that comes from the main course comprised of 6 courses totalling 12 units. The course contents showed that they are methodology related. The second category comes from Education prescribed course containing 2 courses amounting to 4 units. The third category comes from General Studies containing 5 courses with a total of 5 units. All the 6 courses in the main course and the 2 from Education are methodology related while the 5 courses in General Studies are English language related. The meaning therefore is that all the courses provided above address one element in communication namely: vehicle of communication. This is not good enough.

S/No	Instructional Communication Related Courses	Units
1.	ANF 115: Teaching English in Adult and Non-Formal Education I	2
2.	ANF 116: Teaching Mathematics in Adult and Non-Formal Education I	2
3.	EDU 113: Principles and Methods of Teaching	2
4.	GSE 111: General English I	1
5.	ANF 123: Language Issues in Adult and Non-Formal Education	2
6.	GSE 121: General English II	1
7.	ANF 213: Teaching English in Adult and Non-Formal Education II	2
8.	ANF 116: Teaching Mathematics in Adult and Non-Formal Education II	2
9.	EDU 212: Educational Technology: Theory and Practice	2
10.	GSE 211: General English III	1
11.	ANF 226: Methods of Teaching Adult and Non-Formal Education	2
12.	GSE 221: General English IV	1
13.	GSE 221: General English V	1

Table 2: Courses Related to Instructional Communication at NCE Level

The story of the degree programme is even grimmer. Table 3 provides the course structure of a comparative programme at degree level. The programme was developed for Part-Time students using NUC Benchmark for Minimum Academic Standard as pivot.

Year	EDUCATION	GST	MAIN COURSE	Teaching Subject OR Elective	Instructional Communication Courses
I	8	-	12	8	2
II	6	8	8	7	2
III	10	4	8	7	4
IV	9	-	10	7	-
V	10	-	8	7	-
TOTAL	43	12	46	36	-

Table 3: Course Breakdown of a Degree Programme on Adult and Non-Formal Education

Table 3 shows that 43 units have to be earned in General Education, 12 units from General Studies, 46 units from the main course and 36 units from teaching subject or elective. Out these courses, with exception of teaching subject where we cannot predict what students will take, 8 units only are considered relevant to Instructional Communication representing approximately 11% of 137 total units to be earned.

S/No	Instructional Communication Related Courses	Units
1.	ADE 5106: Instructional Strategies in Adult Education	2
2.	EDU 5201: General Methods	2
3.	EDU 5202: Educational Technology	2
4.	EDU 5303: Subject Methods	2
5.	EDU 5304: ICT in Education	2
6.	GST 211: Communication in English II	2

*Table 4: Courses Related to Instructional Communication at Degree Level*

Table 4 shows that all the courses are equally related to vehicle of communication. From the information in the four tables, one can correctly conclude that the curricula that produce secondary school teachers may be reach in content and methodology but very deficient in Instructional Communication. Therefore, it is the position of this paper that we should blame the teachers less for inability to communicate effectively and blame the curriculum more for being responsible for the predicament.

#### **4. A Need for Curriculum Reorganisation of Teacher Education**

This paper is not comfortable with the training secondary school teachers receive in terms of instructional communication. No wonder they result to oral presentation in their lessons because that seems to be what they no best. After all, that was how they were taught in their school days – lecture method which is primarily an oral presentation technique. Therefore, there is a need to reverse the trend by developing and injecting a more comprehensive instructional communication component into teacher education at all levels and find a way of retraining teachers already in the field. This segment proposes some measures that could be adopted to do just that. The measures advocate for development of Instructional Communication content to be injected into secondary school teacher education programme and advocate for collaboration between teacher training institutions, professional associations and teacher employers to implement the content.

#### **5. Curriculum Component**

The curriculum component of the instructional model should focus on expanding the instructional communication content to cover not only vehicle of communication as it were now, but also to include aspects that concern with developing teachers in training to become an efficient communicator in the classroom. We should train teachers to embrace a communication approach that is more relational in nature. This approach assumes that teachers and students mutually have information and ideas to share. This leads to transactional communication interaction which may lead to proper understanding and good relationship between teachers and students. This will further reduce the incidence of flogging students 'to knowledge' by teachers that characterizes many of Nigeria secondary school classes.

The new Instructional Communication Curriculum should not only broaden the methodology exposure which prepares teachers on instructional options available to use, which General Education courses offer, and the skeletal use of language information which General Studies courses provide, but also to include tutoring teachers on non-verbal communication options available. These non-verbal communication techniques may even send stronger message in the class, particularly in the areas of classroom management and control as such curriculum will strike a balance between teachers' verbal and non-verbal behaviour in the class which may promote good learning atmosphere for intellectual development.

The proposed content of the new instructional communication curriculum should include child psychology content that will prepare teachers to face the myriads of varying students' temperament that confront him in the classroom. This is important taking into consideration the large class situation that characterizes Nigeria secondary schools. Student's factor is very strong when determining communication output in the class. This is because the eventual yardstick to measure the success or failure is students output.

#### **6. Teacher Education Institutional Support**

Various teacher training institutions have to champion the inclusion of instructional communication curriculum to the level of their various regulating commission. For example, position papers that stress the need for its development and inclusion in their training manuals could be presented by Deans of Faculties of Education in our universities as well as Provosts of Colleges of Education to NUC and NCCE respectively. This may spur a review which this paper considers very important. The second area training institutions can assist is in retraining the teachers already in the field using the improved

instructional communication content. They could help by running short term courses within their framework that address Instructional Communication Issues for the serving teachers.

### 7. Professional Associations Support

Professional Associations could help greatly by championing the course of empowering secondary school teachers' lesson delivery by organizing activities that help promote effective communication in their various areas of specialization. Professional Association National Conferences should give special consideration to secondary school teachers by giving them the same consideration as that of students in conference registration. This will give many secondary school teachers opportunity to attend conferences and improve on their classroom practices in general and instructional communication in particular.

### 8. Teachers' Employers Support

The employers of teacher whether at public or private level will have to throw in their weight on developing the instructional abilities of their teachers. The employers are the immediate and direct beneficiaries of teachers' services therefore they have to play active role in the secondary school teachers' professional development particularly in the area of instructional communication. They could do so by organizing regular in-house workshops to brush up teachers' knowledge and lesson delivery. Similarly, they can partner with teacher training institutions to organize special training programmes that will improve the teachers' instructional delivery. This they can do as individual employer or collective effort where the cost of such training cannot be borne by a single employer. Equally, the employers should financially support their teachers to attend professional conferences that will add value not only to the teachers' classroom practices, but also to the quality of education provided by such secondary schools.

### 9. Conclusion

This paper will be brought to conclusion by making reference to two important statements. Catt, Miller, & Schallenkamp reported in Bolkan and Goodboy (2009) observe that effective teachers must be experts in their discipline as well as experts in the social dynamics of classroom communication. Sellnow, Lane, Littlefield, Sellnow, Wilson, Beauchamp and Venette (2015) opine that the success of instructional communication is measured by students' cognitive and behavioural learning achievements of learners. The curriculum of secondary school teachers we have presented in this paper may make them expert in their discipline but certainly not experts in social dynamics of classroom communication. Similarly, the numerous complaints and worries express by stakeholders on secondary school performance in public examinations makes us to question the effectiveness of the teachers' instructional communication. Therefore, all stakeholders have to insist on the reversal of the situation by championing the call for improvement of secondary teachers' skills in instructional communication.

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